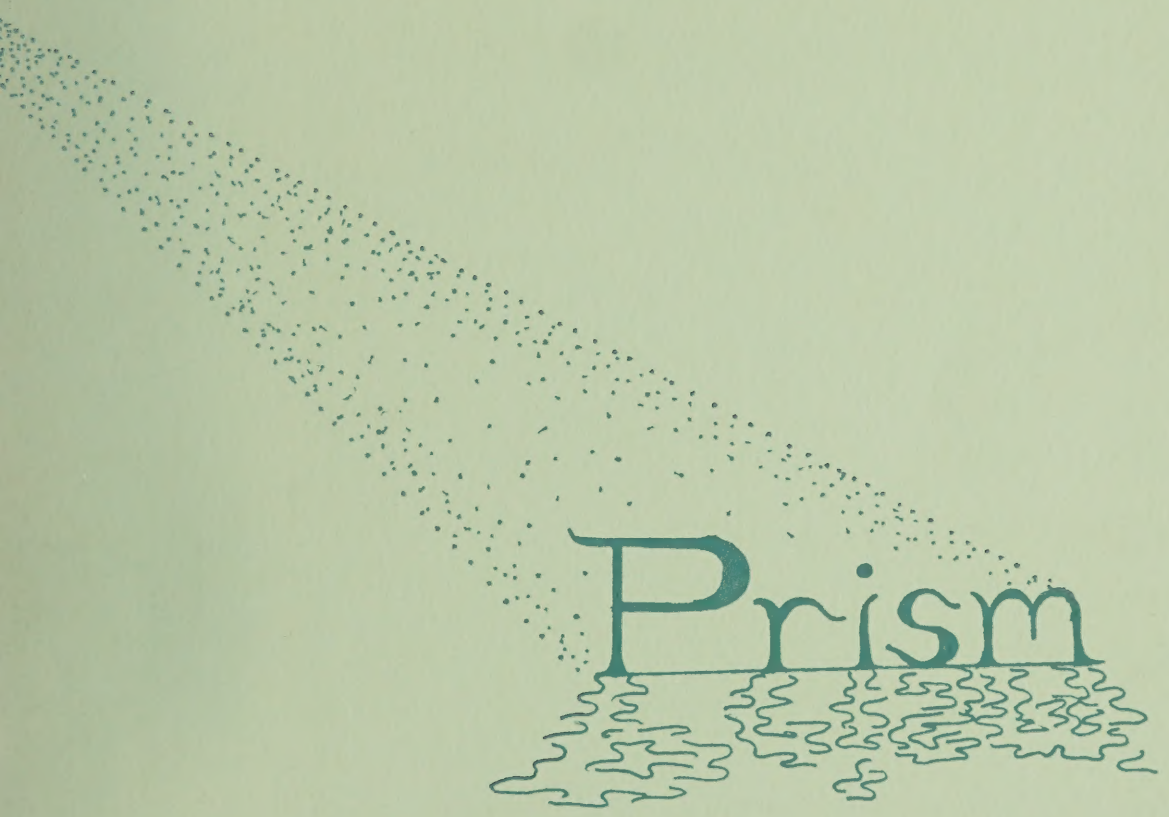
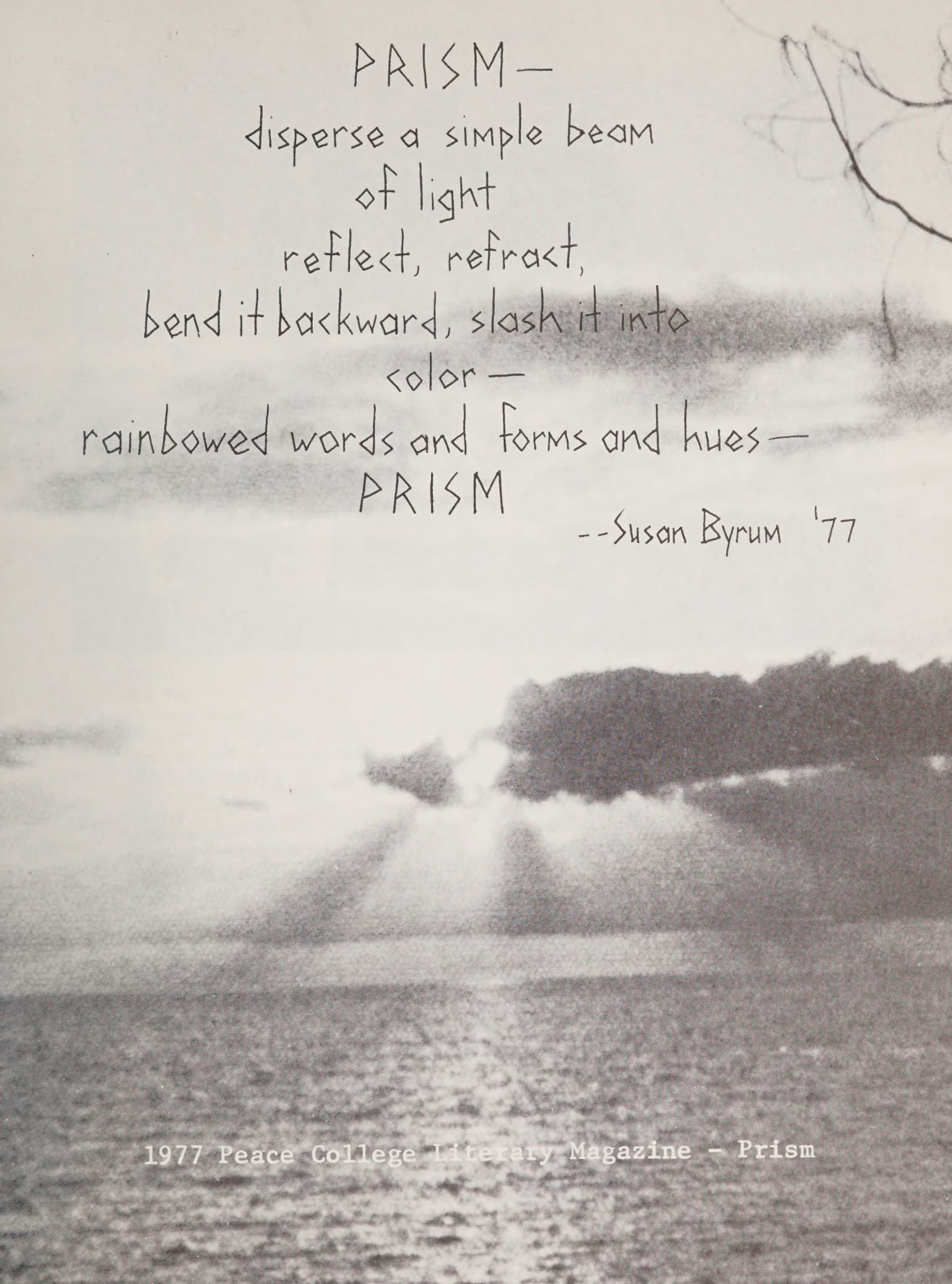

Prism



PRISM—
disperse a simple beam
of light
reflect, refract,
bend it backward, slash it into
color—
rainbowed words and forms and hues—
PRISM

--Susan Byrum '77

1977 Peace College Literary Magazine - Prism

First Prize – Art

Janet Clark

MEMORIES

My mind
projects a
carousel of
still life
magic moments.
MERRY
GO
ROUND.

--Carole Tyler

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Drowsy Resolve

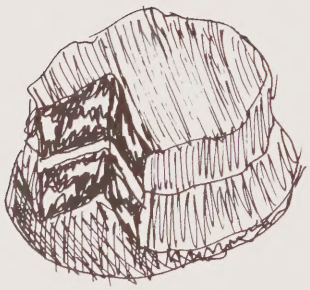
Driven from beloved bed
Up...and grope around the dawn-dark room
To hush the rude alarm.
Don't step on last week's dirty jeans or
This week's pizza box or Clairol's Electric Curler or...

Semi-sleepwalk to the bathroom
Tired toes on orange carpet
Shag defeated from water fights
And far too many feet.

Hot water shower brings me dreams
Of lazy naps and eighteen hours sleep;
Drowsily I resolve to
Send a note to someone
As to the importance of eight-fifteens
And ask when I-
can go on late shift.

--Susan Sutton

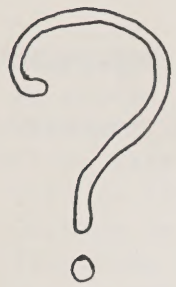
INDULGENCE



that
fresh fudge-marbled delight
nudged between
lip-puckering lemon pies and
sassy ginger snaps
captures my gaze--
yes, "carrots vicky"
will have to wait until another
day for
i've found something sweeter
to set my taste buds blooming
my fork pierces the tender
swirls of brown and white
heaven
the mouth opens;
the morsel disappears--
the guilt sets in.

--Susan Byrum

LEADS



INSIDE ALWAYS LEADS TO OUT
WHICH LEADS TO IN WHICH LEADS TO DOUBT
AND NEVER LETS YOU GO THE WAY YOU WANT TO -
-- DEBBIE HOBBS

To Lori:

Lori was up at the crack of dawn
tip-toeing around to see who might be awake,
ah-ha, fudge popsicle for breakfast
it was written all over her face...
Is that where she gets all that energy
for heaven's sake?

We built sandcastles and ran all day long
up and down Virginia Beach.
After I finally collapsed on our blanket,
she copied every move I made
then held on to my hair to make sure
I was there if she fell asleep.

On the porch, after supper, I sat with Mike
when what did we hear?
my wooden platforms marching down the hall
with little cousin Lori in them, giggling mischeviously.
Then she appeared, also in my brasier!

In my sleep she crept in and pounced on my back;
I wanted to yell "Lori, LORI!"
but her tiny hand shut my mouth
as with the other she balled up my Cosmopolitan.
Suddenly I remembered being just like her...
and she said sweetly, "Tell me a story."
so I did--
One about a kid who's now four times her age.

--Kathy Butler

Full, full, fuller,
To the brim,
So full,
Burst.
Slowly,
It trickles down.
A tear.

--Kathy Adams

Windshield wipers are like arguments;
they never get the subject completely
clear.

-- Sherry Bond

THE MUSIC BOX

Without you
the music in my little box
plays no more,
you no longer pick me up
or wind me, so I no longer dance,
stuffed inside this little box
I'll close my eyes and sleep.

--Debbie Hobbs

RAG DOLL

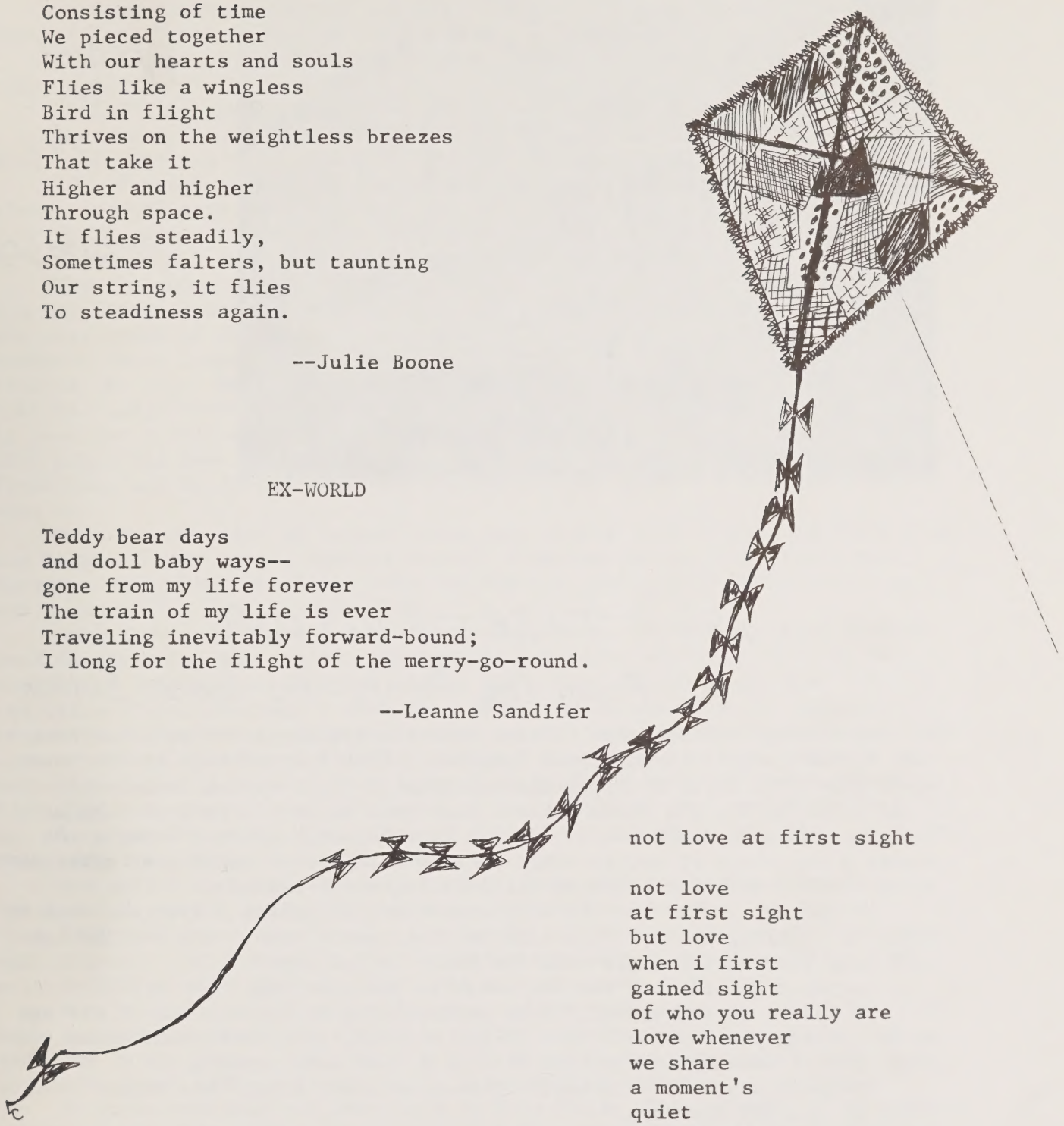
If loneliness were just my little ragdoll,
and understanding went as far
as button eyes could see,
Then maybe I'd accept my feelings
and like a little Raggedy head
I'd smile on childishly.
But thoughts that fill my head
are not of cotton
beneath my skin
I'm as real as I can be..

-- Debbie Hobbs

Our Kite

Our kite
Consisting of time
We pieced together
With our hearts and souls
Flies like a wingless
Bird in flight
Thrives on the weightless breezes
That take it
Higher and higher
Through space.
It flies steadily,
Sometimes falters, but taunting
Our string, it flies
To steadiness again.

--Julie Boone



EX-WORLD

Teddy bear days
and doll baby ways--
gone from my life forever
The train of my life is ever
Traveling inevitably forward-bound;
I long for the flight of the merry-go-round.

--Leanne Sandifer

not love at first sight

not love
at first sight
but love
when i first
gained sight
of who you really are
love whenever
we share
a moment's
quiet
our thoughts
our dreams
and the comfort
of embracing

--Kathy Butler

Special Merit Art

--Lisa Crowell

1st Prize-Fiction

From The Porch: by Susan Sutton

Anna Boney and Margaret Farrior were sisters whose husbands had been dead for as long as anyone could remember. They'd moved back to the house where they were born, to spend the majority of their waking hours on the front porch in the old white rockers that were as much a part of them as the grey curls on their heads. It was late August, and Anna brought the summer's last bowl of butter beans outside with her to shell that afternoon after lunch. Margaret followed her outside, empty-handed.

"Margaret, you've got the most convenient arthritis I ever saw when it comes to shelling beans," Anna said in a sarcastic tone. She settled herself into the rocking chair with the beans in her lap.

Margaret smiled, but was too smart to say anything.

"I know I am the oldest," Anna said, shaking her head, "but if old age keeps hitting you when it's time to get a little work done, next thing you know, you'll wake up in the Pine Hill Rest Home some morning."

Margaret laughed, "You wouldn't send me there Anna," she said; "you enjoy my company too much."

"Hmph! I could buy a dog or a cat and have all the company I need," Anna said. As if on cue, the big black neighborhood tomcat ambled up the front steps. He rubbed up against Margaret's leg until she leaned over and

picked him up. Immediately the cat made himself comfortable and started to purr. He'd been in this lap before.

"Anna, what do you think of the name Tyler?" Margaret asked.

"I like Tyler fine, Margaret," Anna said, without looking up from her butter beans.

"I like it too. Kitty," she said, pushing his chin up so he had to look at her, "what do you think of the name Tyler?"

Anna looked at her sister sharply. "You aren't going to call that stray cat Tyler?" she said.

"Well, I've always been fond of the name," answered Margaret.

"Margaret," Anna said sharply, "Tyler was the name of your late husband. You can't give his name to some street cat."

"Oh, I think it will do just fine," Margaret said. "Mr. Farrior was always fond of cats."

"Well, don't expect me to call that cat Tyler; that's just plain close to sacrilegious," Anna said, picking up another butter bean to shell.

The two women were quiet for some time after that. All you could hear was the "ting" sound the shelled beans made dropping into the metal bowl, the easy creak of the rockers, and the cat's purr. After a while, the newly-anointed Tyler jumped down from Margaret's lap and stretched one leg at a time in the sun. He strolled over to the top of the steps and sat looking over his neighborhood realm. Margaret watched him for a while, then began to pick the multitude of cat hairs from her old summer dress. The faded pink print had seen better days, but it was comfortable and one of Margaret's favorites, and it looked decidedly better without Tyler's black hairs all over it.

Anna put her bowl of butter beans down with a thud. "Want anything from the kitchen?" she asked, pushing herself from the chair. "No, thank you," Margaret said, "but would you bring me the T.V. Guide from the living room and a pencil?"

Anna gave a half nod and went into the house. Margaret's eyes wandered back to the cat. She smiled, thinking of her older sister's reaction to naming the cat Tyler. Anna was always like that, doubtful and dead-set against anything she wasn't used to. Sometimes it was hard for Margaret to keep from saying some pretty outlandish things just to see that stricken look come over Anna's face. But lately Margaret hadn't had to move a muscle to make her sister look upset, not since Pine Hill had been published anyway. Pine Hill was a book named and based on the town that Anna and Margaret lived in. There hadn't been a good piece of gossip circulated in the last few years that hadn't ended up somewhere within its pages.

The author had come from New York to Pine Hill to "write about life in the South," she had said. Her name was Leah Myers, and she had stayed in Pine Hill for almost two years. The people in town had warmed to her. They were friendly and pleased at the thought of actually being in a book. They were delighted with someone interested enough to ask them to be.

Anna's suspicion of out-of-towners and non-relatives had saved her from many gossipy conversations with the author--conversations that might have ended up in the book. And, being a good older sister, she hadn't been about to let Margaret talk to that foreign woman writer either.

Margaret and Anna had been born in Pine Hill. They'd never given thought to living anywhere else. So, even though they weren't in the book, the two were more than merely aware of the wave of bad influence it was having on

their town. Both women realized that Pine Hill had been sorely taken advantage of: Margaret was disturbed about it; Anna was fist-fighting mad about it--disgusted with the people in town for gossiping to begin with, mad at the name the book was giving her hometown, and furious with its author. The old front porch turned into a real hotbed for one-sided arguments when Anna started on that book and that woman who wrote it.

Anna let the screen door slam on her way back out to the porch. The noise sent Tyler flying down the steps. He stopped and turned to look back soon though, making sure everyone knew just how annoyed he was. Margaret laughed. Even Anna managed to smile.

"Here's your T.V. Guide," she said.

Margaret took it, thumbing through until she found the crossword puzzle. Anna settled back in her rocking chair. "Emily called this morning," she said. "Tom McNeal finally found a job in Faison."

"That's good news," Margaret said. "It must be an awful relief for Tom; he's been out of work almost four months now."

Anna stopped shelling and leaned forward. "It makes me so mad I feel plain hot every time I think of what that woman did to this town," she said, pointing at Margaret with a bean shell. "There's no excusing what she's done; I knew she was trouble first time I saw her. Walking bad news is all that woman was." Anna attacked the butter beans.

Margaret waited, in case her sister wasn't through. Sure enough, after a deep breath, Anna continued.

"Gossip--gossip and scandal; that's all she wanted for that book," Anna said angrily, her grey hair bobbing with every word. "Poor Tom McNeal offers her a place to stay in his own house, his own house right across the street, so she won't have to pay for a room while she is here, and what does he get? The first time he happens to drop an opinion he doesn't even mean, she's got it down in her scandal book for the world to see, and now Tom's without a job." Anna threw some shelled beans into the bowl and started again. "It's not just Tom either; half this town was touched by what she put in that book, and the other half is feeling it." Anna paused. "If she ever rides through this town again, she'll be sorry. They'll have to mail her Yankee skin back North in more than one box." She stopped, out of breath.

Margaret rested her chin on her hand as if Anna's angry speech had made her tired. "Anna Boney, you ought to see the face you're making," she said. "It's terrible. And you're going to end up in the front yard if you don't quit rocking that chair so hard."

"At my age, I don't much care what my expression looks like," Anna replied, but she slowed her rocking chair. "Only people that see me are the neighbors and the WMU's."

"Well, I don't think the WMU ladies see very well," Margaret said, "and the neighbors don't have to live with you up close and all the time like I do, so please fix it for my sake before it decides to stay that way."

"Margaret," Anna said, stomping an impatient foot upon the porch floor, "I don't think you realize what that book's done. Come to think of it, if it weren't for me, you'd probably be in that book too, mentioned along with some gossip you'd probably regret having repeated until your last day."

"Now Anna, you know I don't gossip," said Margaret.

"But you would have talked to her," Anna declared with raised eyebrows. "And she has ways of making people gossip whether they are in the habit of

it or not. She befriends people and they end up saying things they never meant to."

Margaret almost laughed. "Anna, you make her sound like a witch, but I would have liked to have talked to her just once. She was such a curious sort of woman--staying in town so long, acting like she loved Pine Hill and everybody in it. Then to publish that book full of nothing but gossip people had said about each other and make the whole town look bad." Margaret looked at her sister, "I just don't understand her. Remember when she first came to town? Everybody was so excited. She had only planned to stay a few weeks, then go back to New York and write the book. She couldn't say enough nice things about Pine Hill then. Why, it was close to two years before she went back and most people didn't want her to leave then. They even gave her a little going away party. When I think of some of the things she put in that book." Margaret frowned and shook her head, "and about the very people she was supposedly fondest of. How do you figure out somebody like that?"

"You don't figure them out," Anna said from her chair with confidence. "You just stay clear of them."

Margaret sighed and shook her head and concentrated on the crossword puzzle. She worked on it a while in silence, then leaned toward her sister. "What's another word for Mohammedanism?"

"How many spaces?"

"Just six."

Anna thought a minute, "I don't know. I was born Baptist. Don't pay much attention to what the heathens are doing."

"Anna, I don't think the Mohammedan people are heathens."

"Probably close to it though," Anna said with a sure nod.

"Well heathen or not, it's about the only word I can't get." Margaret thumbed through the magazine. "Gone With The Wind comes on this week," she said.

Anna ran a hand through the beans, looking for any that weren't shelled. "Margaret," she asked abruptly, "why do we have that magazine? We don't have a T.V."

"We have this magazine because the Johnsons' little boy down the street needed one more subscription to win a fiberglass skate board."

"Well, I'm glad for the little Johnson boy, but I'm worried about you. We could have gotten a good gardening magazine or even a news magazine." Anna shook her head at her sister. "Now we'll know what everybody else is watching on television. I declare, Margaret, sometimes I think you'll be senile before I will." She picked out a butter bean past its prime and tossed it in with the shells.

Margaret laughed. "You might be right, but you can't make me feel bad about getting T.V. Guide. I love crossword puzzles, and I think we ought to have a television anyway."

Anna looked up from her beans, "Margaret, you know how I feel about television, the thing is a terrible waste of time. I read in the newspaper the other day we're going to have a nation full of unbalanced, near-sighted adults soon because children today sit too close to violent programs on T.V."

"I wouldn't doubt it a minute," Margaret said, "but we're both near-sighted already, and we've been adults for a good fifty years now. I don't think we have to worry about T.V. having any effects like that on us."

Anna cleared her throat. "Well," she said softly, "maybe I wouldn't mind having a T.V. just out of curiosity about what might come on. But if

we do get one, it won't be a big one--and it doesn't need to be color either," she said, confident again. "No need to throw away good money."

"All right," Margaret said, smiling a little. She swatted at a mosquito. "It's getting late," she said, changing the subject.

Anna grabbed the bag of bean shells in one arem the bowl of butter beans in the other. "I'm going to start dinner," she said. "You coming in?"

"No," said Margaret. "I think I'll sit here a while longer."

The closing screen door sounded loud against the late afternoon quiet of the neighborhood. Margaret leaned back in her rocker and closed her eyes. The nearby bird chatter almost seemed polite. She smiled at the mental picture of some bird family discussing dinner or the relatives in the top of one of the old oaks along the street. There was no other noise except the occasional far-off cries of playing children.

The afternoon was so peaceful that Margaret was half asleep when the noise of an approaching car made her almost involuntarily open her eyes. The first thing she saw was a big cream-colored Cadillac pull up across the street. Margaret noticed the foreign colors of an out-of-state license plate and nearly ripped off her dress pocket trying to get her glasses out to look at the driver. She was on the edge of her chair now, fully awake. The wide car door swung open and a woman stepped out. She was tall and near middle age, but attractive. Her clothes were stylish, close-fitting, but cool looking and just the thing for summer. There wasn't a store in town which sold anything like them. She walked toward the porch, and at first Margaret thought she'd been seen. But the woman's gaze passed over her and seemed to take in the whole neighborhood. There was a half-smile on her lips like the smile of someone returning to a home she hadn't seen in a long, long time. But this woman would never call Pine Hill home. Margaret must have swallowed a gallon of air when she recognized her. Leah Myers had come back to Pine Hill.

At first Margaret was too shocked to move. But as soon as she recovered, she was on her feet. "Anna," she called in an excited whisper. Margaret glanced back at Leah Myers to make sure she hadn't heard. She hadn't. "Anna, come out here!"

Anna appeared in the hallway, "What is it, Margaret?"

Margaret put her face up to the screen. "Come out here!" she said again in the same hearty whisper, "I want you to see something." Margaret opened the screen door to hurry her sister.

"Look across the street, Anna."

Leah Myers was standing in front of the McNeals' front door now. Her back was the only thing visible from the porch; still, here was a woman Anna would have recognized anywhere. At first Anna was too surprised to speak.

"Now that's one sight I never thought I'd see," Anna said, finally able to open her mouth. "What's she doing back here?"

Margaret shook her head, her eyes still on Leah Myers. They both moved over to the porch rail.

"Why doesn't Tom come to the door, I wonder?" Anna asked.

"I know why," Margaret said, excited. "The whole family has gone to Wallace to Tom's sister's for dinner."

Margaret mentally went over every reason she could think of that might be important enough to bring Leah Myers back to Pine Hill. Maybe she had forgotten something, or maybe she came back to apologize. It had to be more than a social visit. Margaret gripped the porch rail with both hands. "Oh

Anna, we have to say something to her, or at least tell her where they are." She turned to her sister. "What do you think?"

"I think I'm going to call the sheriff," Anna said.

Margaret watched her sister for a minute to decide if she was serious. "That's ridiculous," she said finally. "She's not doing anything wrong. Besides, it's close to six. Ken Brooks is home eating dinner by now."

"Margaret, don't talk to that woman," Anna said, putting her hands on her hips. "If Leah Myers has trouble, it's trouble she bought herself."

"Now, you're worse than she is when you say things like that," Margaret said in a disapproving voice. Anna started to say something in return, but Margaret interrupted, "Oh no, she sees us. We must look a sight, just standing here staring like this."

Leah Myers had turned toward them, hearing their voices for the first time. In spite of fading daylight, she was wearing sunglasses. She took them off now and looked at the two sisters. A smile formed as she recognized them, and she moved toward the porch, her high-heeled sandals clicking against the shaded street, her brisk walk as sure as a businessman's. She slowed just before she reached the sidewalk. "Mrs. Farrior and Mrs. Boney--right?" she said using her sunglasses to point with. She smiled, pleased at remembering the names.

"That's right, Mrs. Myers," Margaret said.

"Call me Leah, please," she said, continuing across the sidewalk. "Everyone always did when I was here before, and I've missed it."

"All right," Margaret said slowly. Leah came to a stop directly in front of the steps. "Well," she said, turning to glance back at the McNeals. "I seem to have arrived at a vacant house."

"Oh it won't be vacant long, the McNeals are . . . well, they ought to be back about nine." Margaret hesitated. She couldn't leave the woman just standing there. "Come have a seat on the porch, Mrs. Myers--Leah; tell us how you are doing."

"Thank you so much," Leah said smoothing an imaginary hair back in place. "It's been a long day. I feel as though I ought to sing some song about the highway being my home; I've been driving so long."

Leah came up the first two steps and then sat down on the top step, facing halfway toward the hostess, small-town fashion. Briefly Margaret worried about the woman's pant suit: it was an expensive-looking royal blue, and the porch had a coating of late summer dust on it.

"Let me get you a chair," Margaret said, already on her way.

"No, no, please, I'm fine right where I am," Leah said.

"She can have my rocking chair," Anna said flatly. "I've got to get dinner started." Anna rose from her rocker with a sullen expression on her face and the old dish towel still in her hands. Margaret breathed a sigh of relief. Anna's leaving was what she had been waiting for. She knew Leah must be thirsty after her trip, but she was a little worried about leaving her alone with Anna to get her anything. Now if Anna would remember some of her upbringing and be reasonably polite, then spend most of the time in the kitchen, they'd all live through this visit.

"Leah, would you like something to drink since Anna's going in?" Margaret asked, looking anywhere but at Anna's face. Leah tilted her head and nodded with a smile. "Please, anything is fine. I'm as dry as August," she said making sudden little fanning motions with her hands.

"Tea or lemonade?" Anna asked as if she were making a threat.

"Lemonade, please," Leah said pleasantly.

Anna nodded and walked inside, not bothering to slow the screen door crashing behind her.

"Anna is not really herself today," Margaret said, embarrassed.

Leah stood up and moved gracefully over to Anna's rocker. She sat on the edge of the chair first, then slid back, crossing her legs. Margaret wondered for a split second how anyone could walk at all in heels so high. Then Leah's voice brought her attention back to the porch. "Do you mind if I smoke, Mrs. Farrior?" she asked, reaching beside the chair for her pocketbook.

"Oh no, please make yourself at home." Margaret paused, then added, thinking, "Heaven knows where we'll find an ashtray, though. There hasn't been a smoker in this family since Daddy died."

"Then please forget it. I smoke too much as it is," Leah said, shaking her head.

"It's no trouble, Margaret said, "a saucer will do, I suppose." Margaret half turned in her rocking chair and called through the screen door to Anna to bring a saucer along with the lemonade. There was nothing but silence from the kitchen. Margaret had taken a breath to call again when she caught the sound of a mutter and a slamming cabinet door.

"Tell me, Mrs. Farrior, have you read my book?" Leah asked, too suddenly.

"I've seen parts of it," Margaret said, resisting an uncomfortable urge to squirm.

"Oh, you ought to read it all. It's about your town, you know," she said pointing at Margaret. "I put Pine Hill on the map." Margaret noted the pride in Leah's voice.

"Yes, you have," Margaret said, forcing her own voice to sound casual.

Leah took a breath, then paused. "By the way, do you know where the McNeals are?" she asked.

"Yes I do." Margaret ran her fingers over the arm of the rocker. She spoke carefully, "But don't you think it would be better if you didn't see the McNeals?" Margaret looked closely at the woman's face, watching for any emotion that might be hidden there.

"Why not, after all the time I spent with them?" Leah asked, meeting Margaret's gaze.

"Tom McNeal lost his job, you know."

Leah's face was calm, even pleasant. "I believe I heard something about it. He has a new job now doesn't he?"

"Yes he does but. . ."

"Well then it ought to be all right," she said smiling. "Why, the book is on the best-seller list. I never thought it would go quite so well, did you?"

Margaret only nodded. She was stunned for a moment by Leah's indifference. It reminded her that she was talking to a woman she didn't understand.

Then the screen door flew open and Anna marched out with the lemonade and a saucer. She handed them to Leah, then took a step back and crossed her arms on her chest, staring at the unwelcome visitor.

"It looks delicious," Leah took a sip, "and tastes even better than it looks. Thank you," she said smiling again.

Anna muttered something similar to "You're welcome," and stomped back into the house.

Leah sat the lemonade down on the porch. She leaned over and pulled a leather cigarette case from the blue summer bag beside her chair. Her cigarettes were different from any Margaret had ever seen. They were thin and brown. She chose one and lit it with a practiced ease, then leaned back in her chair and blew a perfect smoke cloud at the porch ceiling. For a moment Margaret thought she was going to prop her feet up on the porch rail, she seemed so relaxed. Margaret couldn't help but wonder how long her guest would remain. If Leah didn't leave soon, she'd have to ask her to stay and eat dinner. Anna would throw a tantrum if that happened, and Margaret really wasn't too taken with the idea either. She was still struggling with her decision of whether to ask or not when a little stirring breeze from somewhere brought the distinct and delicious smell of Anna's chicken straight from the kitchen. Margaret looked at Leah through the corner of her eye. Leah lightly sniffed the air. Oh no, Margaret thought, she definitely smells dinner. Feeling a little trapped, Margaret knew she'd have to ask Leah to stay out of plain courtesy, but prayed she already had plans for dinner somewhere down the road.

"Leah, why don't you stay and have dinner with us?" Margaret said, trying her best to sound sincere.

Leah crossed her legs. "You know, I hadn't given my dinner a thought. But I couldn't eat here," she said; "that would be imposing, and it's too late. . ."

Anna, who could hear everything through the screen door, came out on the porch with her hands on her hips. She'd obviously heard her sister's invitation for dinner and found it overly generous.

"Oh, it's not that late," Margaret said, "and we certainly have enough to go around." She turned to her sister. "Don't we Anna?" she said in a firm voice.

"Probably," Anna answered. She glared at Margaret.

"If you're sure you don't mind company, and you have plenty," she paused and smiled, "I'd love it. But the least I can do is help with dinner. Put me to work," she said, half-way out of the rocker.

Anna held up a hand, "No, thank you, you stay right where you are. You're company," she added in a sarcastic voice.

Anna's tone stopped Leah in mid-air. She paused there a second, and then slowly sat down again. No one spoke. Margaret was too embarrassed; Leah was too surprised, and Anna was still angry.

The silence had become more than awkward when the breeze stirred again and the odor of frying chicken was carried over the neighborhood--or at least as far away as Tyler. He gave a soft meow and landed on the porch rail directly in front of Leah.

"What a beautiful cat," Leah said, but made no move to touch him. "Is he yours?" she asked, looking at Margaret.

"No, Tyler's more or less a free spirit," Margaret said, looking at the cat.

Tyler was obviously a little surprised to find company on his porch. He watched Leah with moon-yellow eyes in the same unembarrassed way a child stares at an unfamiliar anything.

Leah smiled sweetly. "Last time I was here I was told black cats were bad luck to have around," she said lightly.

Anna made a funny little noise in her throat. She apparently considered the comment a direct insult to the South and to her own good sense. She

also evidently considered it the straw that broke the camel's back. Her hands flew back and settled on her hips again; she was ready to come forth with heaven-knows-what. Sensing the storm, Margaret turned toward her sister, shooting her a look that ought to have sealed all lips forever. Anna glared back a moment, then marched into the house, taking care to slam the screen door behind her. The slam had the same effect on Tyler it had had earlier in the day, and he disappeared so fast it was hard to connect the noise and his leaving.

Margaret controlled the urge to run in the house after Anna--anything to avoid the conversation she knew was coming. But the excuse she needed wouldn't come, and then it was too late.

"I don't think your sister approves of me," Leah said matter-of-factly.

Margaret could feel Leah watching her. She twisted a button on her dress to cover her uneasiness.

"Sometimes Anna must be taken with a little grain of salt," Margaret said. She looked over at Leah and was surprised to see her face seem almost pleasant.

"You know, Mrs. Farrior," Leah said nonchalantly, "I really wanted you in my book. You would have been a nice interview." Leah held up a hand so the light from the living room fell across her polished nails.

Something moved in the back of Margaret's mind. Watching Leah admire her hands, she suddenly understood the reason behind all the indifference: Leah wasn't upset by Anna's feelings toward her, nor did she feel guilty about any wrong she'd brought about in Pine Hill. To Leah, the book Pine Hill was more real than the town it was based upon. The townspeople were just potential interviews, a part of the book.

Her discovery left Margaret as full of dismay as it did anger. She looked away, realizing how long it had been since she had spoken and tried to remember the last thing Leah had said. "Thank you, Leah," Margaret finally said, trying to sound normal. "But I don't think I would have been much of a sensation in print."

"A sensation? Oh, I see what you mean. I did get a few exciting little stories, didn't I?" she said, smiling to herself. "Did you read the chapter entitled 'The Affair'?"

"I heard about it," Margaret said softly.

"Now that was an exciting interview. Human interest stories like that really appeal to the public," Leah said. Her eyes shone.

"It caused some excitement here, too," Margaret said. For the first time, her voice held a bitter edge.

"What kind of excitement?" Leah asked. She drank the last of the lemonade and sat the glass down on the porch rail.

"Most of the people here in town recognized those in the interviews as soon as they read them," Margaret said curtly.

"But I didn't give any names," Leah said quickly, her voice defensive.

Margaret didn't say anything for a minute, realizing she'd have to try to show Leah the harm she had caused, if not for her town, then to calm her own anger. She settled back in her chair and rocked herself a little, relaxed for the first time since her guest arrived. She looked over at Leah. "This is a little town," she said. "When you write down word for word what somebody here says, there is always going to be somebody else who can recognize who did the talking, just from the words they used and what they talked about. You must have known that would happen." Leah met her gaze

but said nothing. "To anyone who has lived in Pine Hill any amount of time--and most of us have--the people involved in those interviews are as obvious as if they'd signed their names at the end. And anybody who didn't catch on to who was saying what in that book wasn't kept in the dark long. People have always been good at sharing what they know," said Margaret, shaking her head.

"I suppose it was embarrassing for that young couple," Leah said, almost shrugging her shoulders.

"Yes, it was," Margaret said, watching Leah's face. "In fact, the boy left Pine Hill to avoid the rumors and, I suppose, to protect the girl. It didn't really do much good though. You know how rumors fly no matter what. Her reputation is gone now, and he's lost his home."

Leah picked her empty glass up from the porch rail and examined it. "Of course, I had no way of knowing anyone would find out. But you see," Leah said, sitting straighter, "the same element that makes the story stand out the way it does makes it good reading in my book."

Margaret nodded calmly. She had control now. "They were people, Leah," she said.

"Exactly, Mrs. Farrior," Leah said, excited, "human events. What could be more human, more real, than my interview with those two young people? And what about the earthy, honest quality my book gives this town?" she gestured with the glass. "Did you see that? I've put Pine Hill on the map."

"All right," Margaret said quietly, "but when you talk about the chapter entitled 'The Affair,' please remember the sacrifice two people made in giving you that real and human interview."

Leah sat the lemonade glass down hard beside the chair. "Mrs. Farrior," Leah said annoyed, "if they were truly hurt as you say, then they have only themselves to blame for what they said. I only asked them questions."

"They trusted you," Margaret said.

"You can't begin to understand what this might mean for Pine Hill someday," she said in an impatient voice. "I've made this town famous." She shook her head.

"The McNeals were very fond of you. You must have liked them too to have come back for a visit with them," Margaret said slowly. "Tom McNeal loved his work. He'd been with that company for almost twenty years when he lost his job because of that interview. He's not young, you know."

Leah looked away. "But he does have a new job now," she said in a voice so faint Margaret could barely hear her.

They sat quietly for a moment, then Leah Myers stood up. She turned to her hostess.

"I'm afraid I can't stay for dinner after all," she said. "It's getting late, and I need to get started," she smiled politely. "Do read my book. It's about your town." Leah paused and lowered her eyes. "Thank you for the dinner invitation, and please give your sister my regards."

Margaret nodded.

"You can't beat Southern hospitality, after all," Leah said.

They both smiled.

Margaret stood up.

"I still wish you'd been in my book. We all have a story to tell, you know."

"We certainly do," said Margaret.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Farrior." Leah extended her hand. Margaret hesitated, then accepted her hand.

"Good-bye, Leah."

Leah went down the steps slowly. Just as she reached the street, she turned back to look at Margaret. "You needn't tell the McNeals I came by," she hesitated. "I'll send them a card or something."

Margaret smiled and nodded. She watched Leah cross the street, get into her car, and drive away. Smiling sadly to herself, she sat down in her chair and rocked gently. The screen door creaked, and Anna was beside her on the porch. Margaret didn't move.

"Is she gone?"

"Yes, she said she couldn't stay after all, but she did ask me to thank you just the same."

"Well, I can't say I'm sorry she's not staying." Anna shook her head. "Last thing my cranky stomach needs is that woman to look at across my dinner table."

Margaret was silent.

Anna tapped an impatient foot. "Are you coming to dinner or not? That aggravating cat has probably come through the kitchen window after the chicken already."

Margaret looked up at Anna and smiled. Pushing herself from the chair, Margaret followed her sister inside, and the screen door closed softly behind them.

1st Prize-Poetry

TRANSITION

Oblivious
To the fragility
Of an old woman and her crumbling front porch,
The vibrant green of wandering jew
Intertwines luxuriously
Around her.
She sits in the twilight,
Rocking.
Unaware that she is
    --the loveliest flower, lushest flower
    --white flower, lily flower.
Transitory beauty.
Passers-by glimpse
no Picasso abstraction;
Only the hushed perfection
Of a real life
        Still life.

--Cyndie Taylor

"in strictest confidence"

running
through a shower
of autumn tears
shed by seasoned trees
snuggling,
thick-sweatered and listening
as fall whispers
her first crisp secret
makes me want to be
a tattletale.

--Susan Byrum

Special Merit Poetry

introspection

dancing in shadows of yesterday
i found lost love and tried to play
  in indian tents and fields of hay.

turning to see myself from behind
i saw my face wrapped up in time,
  trapped in unique theaters of mime.

opening the book, i closed my eyes,
for fear of winning the biggest prize.

--Betsy Grimes

LAVENDER LACE

(unplanned,)
You felt me nine months
 before you held me.
You dreamed an amber-golden dream
 of a lavender-laced beauty;
    dream cleaved from your sweet-scented pillow,
    dream kept always at hand, even
      when I'd emerged...
You soothed a doll-baby dream-queen,
 cherub confection,
   while pleas for your awakening
   echoed blankly in bolted ears.
Wake up Momma.
 Lavender lace goes with never-neverland,
 not natural knits in shades of sand.
Open your dream-laden lids
 please free,
   the lavender-laced beauty:
     reality is me.

--Anne Van Tassel

SPECIAL MERIT FICTION

ABSOLUTION: A short story by Cyndie Taylor

The cold cubicle in which Father Thompson listened to confessions was often the cause of his desire to give lighter penances, for the simple reason that just sitting there for any amount of time was enough punishment for many sins. He, himself, felt as though he did penance four times daily, each time he stepped inside. He had heard other priests speak of their feelings as they pardoned sinners. Many said they felt God himself was lending His wisdom through their words, and that they were high above the physical world in their spiritual closeness with God. Father Thompson didn't. In fact, it was at these moments he felt most keenly his mortality, helpless to help others, far removed from all human contact and icy cold, much as if he were in a tomb.

He could tell by the voice on the other side of the cubicle that the confessor was a young girl, one who had probably come to him because of his own youthfulness, seeking just counsel from one of her own generation who "understood." She also might have been a little infatuated by him, as young girls were apt to make romantic martyr figures out of young priests whose celibacy they could not quite understand but admired. Father Thompson knew of cases in which priests had taken advantage of such young girls, and although he could not condone that behavior, he had begun to perceive that they had merely conceded to the struggle he himself had undergone.

Father Thompson's thoughts were suddenly dispersed by the dead silence on the other side of the screen. He realized in a moment of anguish that he had not really listened, that he had allowed his preoccupation with himself to override his responsibility to the confessor. However, he knew he could not ask the girl to repeat her confessions.

"Five Hail Marys," he said.

"Is that all?" breathed the girl involuntarily. "Thanks, Father!"

Where an older priest might have laughed, Father Thompson sighed. Whatever the girl had done, his requirement had not been enough; next time he would have to give a sterner penance. Another mistake.

He climbed out of the confessional and walked toward the prayer benches, his limbs stiff with cold. He wondered about the congregation's reaction if he did a couple of cartwheels to start his circulation, and chuckled at the picture of his vestments flailing aimlessly with the motion of his arms and legs. The lady next to him gave him a rude stare, and he sat down on the pew.

The priest glanced around the cathedral, which seemed particularly full. He hoped the people were there to accept the warmth of the Lord, and had not stepped in merely to escape the cold. Most of the faces were unfamiliar, and he knew he would be meeting many within the next few weeks. He relished the idea; his natural gregariousness had not left him when he first donned his priest's robe.

Scanning the worshippers, Father Thompson was glad to notice the variety in attire; he wanted the opportunity to deal with all types of people. He

judged most of the people to be in the middle class, with a liberal sprinkling on either side of the spectrum. The woman next to him was wearing some sort of fur jacket. Further up the aisle was a man with a denim jacket slung over his shoulder; two little girls, who must have been his children, were standing beside him. Although one seemed a little taller than the other, they were dressed identically in green dresses with matching ribbons in their plaited yellow hair. Both clutched their rosary beads in their hands so tightly that Father Thompson felt they might pop at any moment and go careening in every direction. He smiled at the earnestness in their expressions as they knelt beside their father.

Father Thompson knelt also, still feeling that annoying stiffness in his legs. It had been a long time since he'd had any real physical exercise. In college he had been a cliche personified, the original All-American Joe College. He had played his life by the rules both on and off the field. His college career had been peppered with honors and accomplishments, and at the end of the four years, he was ready to be established in business with his uncle--except for the persistent feeling that for the first time, he was making a mistake.

He remembered the turmoil preceding his decision to go into the Church, how confused he had been at all the signals that seemed to point him away from his business major into a completely different lifestyle, and the convincing, persuasive peace he knew after his choice was made. His uncle had been disappointed, but the rest of his family, devout Catholics themselves, quietly accepted as always any decision he might make. In fact, Brad suspected they were secretly overjoyed, especially his father, who seemed relieved that his son would escape the problems he had experienced all his life in his own business. He and his father joked about his aptitude for salesmanship, and how he would have to "sell God" now.

Now he saw once more the pride that flashed in his father's eyes as he had left for seminary. He remembered how the sunlight, which should have been harsh on his father's face, only served to soften and contour it until the lines of care seemed to disappear. All that stood between father and son was the soft sunlight. His father had said, "Brad, if anybody can do it, you can," and gave him a tremendous hug and released him quickly, startling Brad. His father had never hugged him before in his life.

But even with reassurance from all sides, he had never been prepared for the feelings that were tearing at his insides now. In prayer, he relived those past experiences and asked the recently much repeated question of how and why he felt as though inadequacy and inferiority were leering at him from every dark corner of the huge cathedral. From his subconscious came the reason he knew he had suppressed throughout divinity school: he felt everything had come too easily for him. He had not suffered enough to relate to those in his parish who suffered; therefore, he carried a tremendous guilt burden. He asked for the reassurance he knew must come from within.

The young priest prayed so intently the people around him melted into nothingness like the candles that slowly diminished under the altar of Mary. He was unaware that to them, he looked like a repentent little boy saying prayers at his bedside with his mother smiling over him.

When he rose he felt a small charge of renewal, but the old despair still clung at him. He was too tired even to look for signs of acceptance anymore.

Directly at his back he felt an aching just of cold wind. Massachussetts, he was reminded, was so different from the warm climate of his youth. He turned

to see a young man, taking in at a glance the brown plaid jacket, the faded jeans, and tousled straw-color hair. But it was the look of intensity in the boy's eyes that made Father Thompson feel he knew the boy, although he was aware that he had never seen him before. There was such a desperate searching air about the boy in the way he scanned the cathedral. He had a sort of paradoxically deliberate yet disjointed manner, as though he needed something immediately but was just a little too frightened to seek it out himself. His feet, clad in the hiking boots characteristic of the college men in this snow-driven town, made a grating noise as he shuffled them unconsciously against the cold stone floor. He jammed his bare hands, reddened by the biting wind outside, into his pockets when he saw Father Thompson quickening his pace toward him, but his gray gaze never left the priest.

"Can I help you?" Father Thompson asked when he reached him.

The boy slowly nodded once. Then he protested in an apologetic tone, "But I'm not even Catholic."

"It's okay," Father Thompson smiled, and gestured for the boy to follow him past the pews and confessionals. "My office is right this way," he said, and then repeated as he saw that the look of uncertainty remained: "Really, it's all right." The boy barely nodded, but followed him.

"They stuck me in a little cubbyhole off to the side here, barely big enough for me and the mouse that shares it with me," Father Thompson said. "It's probably a test of patience given to every new priest just to make sure he'll stay. When the mouse and I are in there together, if he squeaks, the walls explode."

The boy laughed behind him, and after they had entered the office and the priest faced him, he saw that the tautness had begun to disappear from his face. The boy pulled his knit cap from his curly hair, as if suddenly remembering his mother's training. Father Thompson smiled. He motioned his guest to a chair, and sat down behind the huge oak desk that occupied three-forths of his cramped office.

The young man had assumed what the priest guessed was his natural air of confidence. Only his eyes betrayed his inner tumult as he surveyed Father Thompson's tiny domain. The priest almost flinched as he saw the clutter through the boy's eyes. Cardboard boxes stacked chest-high and littered packing straw were the remainders of his moving-in chaos two weeks ago. His books were not all arranged neatly in the bookshelves as befitted a proper priest, he thought in dismay; and there was a stain on the carpet from his coffee break as he had taken a last gulp on his way that morning. He supposed the disarray looked more or less "professional."

The young man grinned. "Your office looks like my dorm room."

"Around exam time?" Thompson laughed, relieved.

"No--all the time."

"Ah, I thought you looked the serious student type."

"Guess I have to be; I'm in pre-med."

"Hmm--your last year?"

"Yes sir. Next year it's Harvard Med School for me."

"Impressive!" The priest chuckled. "My brother graduated from their undergraduate school just last year."

The boy really smiled this time. "My name's Scott Pearson.

"Father Brad Thompson." He extended his hand across the desk.

"Father, I really appreciate your being willing to. . . ." He paused and leaned back, then forward in his chair until his elbows rested on his knees. His entire position was one of tension.

"There's no need to hurry. Take your time." The priest waited, and watched the boy twist his cap repeatly.

"Father, you know I'm not Catholic. My mother is, but I really have my own religion. Oh, not one of those cults or anything--just my own personal relationship with God."

Scott seemed to make a conscious effort to temper his sudden burst with simulated control. He looked down at his cap. "But I thought it'd be all right to come to you." There were several breaks in his voice, "because this concerns someone in your parish."

"It would be all right anyway," the priest said gently.

"Thanks." Scott sighed, barely audibly. "I really hated the idea of having anyone else do my thinking for me; I'm used to making my own decisions, but this is really a favor for someone else."

"Wait a second." The priest waved his hand. "I'm not here to do your thinking or make your decisions. I'll just listen and advise."

"I'd appreciate that." Scott stared levelly at Father Thompson. "But I still hate having to ask for advice."

"That's what I'm here for," said the priest. He began to feel a strong admiration for this young man, and admiration he somehow knew would not be unfounded. Despite Scott's tension and apparent skittishness, the priest perceived instinctively that the boy was one of those rare people whose soul seemed to need no outer casing of the body at all. Every gesture, each work and look portrayed his sincerity.

"Well, as I said, this concerns someone in your parish--a young woman." Scott ran his hand through his butterscotch hair.

Father Thompson leaned forward on his desk until his own body matched the intensity of Scott's. "Is this young woman your. . . girlfriend?" he asked.

"I don't like that word; it sounds so immature. But for lack of a better one, yes." Scott's eyes never left the priest's face. The boy gazed at him as though he wished the priest could miraculously foresee his problem. "We. . . we're not engaged formally, but we will be married one day. . . ." his voice trailed off.

"After med school?" Father Thompson hated to prod, but it was necessary.

"I guess. . . maybe." Scott unconsciously ran two fingers underneath the turtleneck of the thick white sweater he wore in obvious discomfort. The boy looked as though the turtleneck were choking him, or perhaps it was the pressure Scott felt that was choking.

"I don't know," the boy's face contracted. "I'm just not too sure of anything anymore." He shut his eyes as a barricade against pain, and dropped his head on his hands.

Father Thompson fought the temptation to rise from his desk and put his arm around the boy; he knew Scott needed more than concrete comfort.

"Scott, I think you're sure of one thing."

"What's that? Scott replied dully.

"You really love that girl. Don't you?"

"You're right." Scott slowly lifted his head until he stared into the priest's eyes with that steady gaze once more. "You're right; I do love her. And that's what got us into this mess in the first place."

The priest thought it wise to let the boy tell him in his own way. He watched Scott, hoping his concern would somehow be projected through his eyes.

Scott got up and went to the window, barely seeing the frozen movements of the children trying to play in the park against the wind and traffic noises.

"You know the story, Father." His voice took on a disgusted bitter edge. "Boy meets girl, boy falls in love with girl, and they usually marry unless the boy happens to have five or six years of school before him. But they still love each other, so. . ."

He turned to face Father Thompson. "I'm part of that age old trap I always thought I'd be too smart to be caught in. It's really ridiculous, and probably trite to you."

"No," said the priest. "Even if this were the millionth time I'd heard it, it wouldn't be trite."

"Father, you just don't know what it's like for two people in love. . ."

"Yes, yes I do know what it's like."

Scott dropped his keys, his voice reflective and calmer. "Maybe you do at that." His admission gave the priest the confidence he needed to continue.

"So what to do, Scott?"

"Father, I wouldn't be here if I knew that." He clenched his fist and struck it on the desk with lonely concealed bitterness on his face. His mouth was a tight line. "It's just a dirty trick. I have four more years of school to go through. I can't support a family, and I don't want to!"

"You think that's the only advice I'll give you?"

"I. . . I'm not sure what the Catholic position is. My girl's not a strict Catholic; I'm not even sure she knows."

"Well, to be honest, that is the Catholic position, and as a Catholic priest, that is the only official counsel I can offer. But, you as a non-Catholic have much more freedom of choice."

Father Thompson paused, and saw the boy's ragged face.

"Father, do you, personally, think abortion is wrong?"

The priest answered haltingly, all too aware of the boy's distressing gaze.

"You. . . you know what I have to say. Scott, if you really love her. . ."

"Damnit, Father, you know that doesn't make any difference! We would've been married freshmen year if we'd had our choice!" He stuffed his hands belligerently into his blue jean pockets. "What am I supposed to do, put on a blue collar and tramp to the factory every morning? There's sure nothing else I can do. This is November; I have six months to graduation!"

"Surely your father. . ."

"He's gone, not dead, just gone. My mom broke her back just to get me tuition. And my girl's parents actually do work in a factory."

The boy turned away, and appeared to be scrutinizing the bookshelves in painful detail. "So you see," said Scott, and his bitterness cut into the priest more sharply than any wind, "it <u>is</u> the age-old problem, complete with sob story."

"Are you sure about. . . the child?"

"No. Not completely." he answered with a catch in his voice.

"Scott, both of you seem to be conscientious people. I know you can't see through the pain right now, but there's some reason for this. I mean it."

Scott turned to face the priest again. "I believe you."

Father Thompson nodded. "For right now, I suggest that you pray."

"I have," the boy said vehemently.

"Then pray some more. Never stop praying, and I don't mean just right now. Take it one step at a time, and try not to panic. After you're sure, come back and see me. We can pray together right now if you like."

Scott hesitated. "Thank you, Father, but I'd feel uncomfortable."

"It doesn't matter," the priest said, "as long as you're praying."
"And what exactly shall we, Marcia and I, pray for?"
"Pray for the best thing for both of you."
Scott pulled on his cap. "I'll pray. . .that there is no baby."
The two clasped hands. "Good luck, Scott," said the priest.
The young man nodded briefly. "Thank you, Father," he paused. "Really."
Father Thompson watched as the boy strode out the door. He had a walk that was peculiar to athletes, accompanied by a sort of rolling of the shoulders. And suddenly the priest knew why Scott had looked so familiar. The boy reminded him of a young athlete he knew once before, who had paced for hours with shoulders hunched, on the verge of a life-time decision.

* * *

In the days that followed, the parish duties became less and less tedious, as Father Thompson let his own personality emerge through the priest's frock. He was beginning to realize now that he belonged to that new breed of priests, and that it didn't matter to him if he wore jeans and a shirt or traditional vestments. Dress didn't make the office any more or less holy. He was working very hard to prove to the youth of the community that beneath the vestments, priests were fallible men.

The episode with Scott had been the first of many in which the priest felt he was giving sound guidance. The lines at his confessional booth were always twice as long as those at any of the other priests'--not because he was too lenient with penance, but he hoped because of his humor and ability to convince the confessors not to let their sins consume them, but to repent and go on. He was also rapidly becoming close to an older priest, Father Rutledge, who was, strangely enough, completely opposite Father Thompson both in theory and practice. They complemented each other! Father Thompson demonstrated his youthful views, and Father Rutledge constantly cautioned his young friend of the dangers of over enthusiasm.

The nagging feeling of inadequancy had almost completely disappeared, so suddenly that Father Thompson was a little wary. But he didn't want to think about his past inadequancy; he exuded self-confidence now and felt closer to God than ever before. The flaw in his life was that there was just much too much to be done, and although he enjoyed most of it, he supposed there would always be duties he could only tolerate. Paperwork was one such duty, but his boredom with it did not compare with the dread he felt on the days he visited rest homes. He hated the feeling of inertion; once he had had to wait helplessly for a nurse as an elderly lady had a convulsion. He wanted to be able to help all the people physically somehow--praying was not enough.

It had been a little under two weeks since he had seen Scott; in this case, too, he felt that praying was not enough, though he had been doing plenty of it. Because of the time lapse, he supposed that the pregnancy tests had been positive, but he wondered what the couple's decision would be. He felt a strong compulsive need to know.

He was restless. Outside, though the temperature was freezing, it was a beautiful day, the kind in which it was easiest to believe in God. He had to get out of his littered office. Smiling, he placed the finished pile of paperwork on top of the much larger unfinished pile, just in case of a visit from the chaplain, and went into the cathedral to admire the light in the staine glass before going outdoors.

The priest recognized the curly hair and straight profile before anything was said to him. Scott was sitting in the last pew. Although Father Thompson had not made a sound, Scott turned as if he knew the priest had been there.

"I took your advice; I prayed for the best thing for both of us, " the young man said, and his eyes were like gray marbles. Father Thompson felt a chill that slowly spread.

"The best thing," Scott continued, "would've been for there not to be a baby." His eyes slowly changed to a gray mist.

"And?" the priest whispered, knowing his eyes would fill also.

"She miscarried," Scott said tensely. "Yesterday, she miscarried."

The priest pressed his lips into a thin, white line.

"Father, I feel like I've murdered my child!" Scott's voice filled with irony. "I prayed for the baby not to exist, and God answered my prayers, all right." He sprang up from the pew and into the aisle beside the priest. His face was a vivid scarlet, the color of shame. "What right did I have?" Then he suddenly lashed out, "You were supposed to help me. Why didn't you stop me?"

The priest slowly sank to the pew, his face collapsed. Scott stopped still, and his eyes widened in recognition of his cruelty.

"Father. . . ah no. I didn't mean that."

"It's all right," the priest said heavily. He swept Scott's accusation to the back of his mind until he could ask his Father for forgiveness.

The boy shook his head. "No, no, it's not all right. I'm just not thinking straight."

"Don't blame yourself. About that or about your loss. Your praying for your girl not to be pregnant and for the child's death are two completely and totally different things. Surely you realize that, Scott. As for thinking this is some kind of punishment, which I'm sure you are. . . well, a miscarriage is usually God's way of taking care of an imperfect baby."

Scott bit his lip and looked beyond the priest, not really seeing the people in various attitudes of prayer. "I should've just asked for the strength to do the right thing, <u>whatever</u> happened."

The priest smiled faintly. "Sounds to me like you're thinking pretty straight."

"It wasn't for me to try to decide." The boy looked down at his shoes, and brushed his hand across his eyes. The priest handed him his handkerchief.

"I haven't let go like this in awhile," Scott said.

Neither have I, Father Thompson thought to himself. He looked at Scott, who was staring at the huge stained-glass window far at the front of the cathedral.

"Marci's worse than I am," the young man said. "I think, she wouldn't admit it, but I think she really wanted this baby," he paused, ". . .my baby." Scott shook his head slightly, then looked down at the priest. "We're still getting married, and soon," he said, almost defiantly. "We decided last week, and it wasn't just because of the baby. And what happened only makes our feeling stronger."

The priest nodded. "You two should be together."

"We'll make it," Scott said. His voice was still defensive.

"I know you will. You have love." The priest paused, "but more than that, both of you have integrity."

Scott smiled slightly. He turned to leave, then suddenly turned back. "Hey Father, do you think you'd like to marry a couple of unorthodox Catholics?"

Startled, Father Thompson rose until his eyes met the frank grayness of the boy's. The scene was suddenly reminiscent to the priest of a long ago time when his father had surprised him with a huge hug. The light filtering from the stained-glass windows reflected its golden intensity on the boy's face, lending golden flecks to his eyes. The priest suddenly embraced the young man, and just as quickly, released him.

"See you in church," the priest said.

Scott smiled. His golden-gray eyes met the priest's in silent gratitude.

As the boy pulled open the huge door, the priest did not feel the usual cold blast of air; he thought it must be getting warmer. Smiling, he turned and went up the aisle to watch the altar boy light the candles for Mass.

* * * * *

FOR A MARRIED FRIEND

During study hall we met to straighten our lives,
Break between classes to analyze classmates
Lunch was sparse: food for thought
Phone at night reserved to solve the world's crises.

Old friend, you had a taste for the richness of purity:
Transformed celery to whipped cream
Denim to ermine.
Your mind overflowing, soul a study in luxury
(Is he your silken sultan inside as well?)

Uninhibited you, the type of friend who
Cradled me in your crazy comfort.
You never thought it was queer
To touch, to hold a dear friend.

Women's Libbers we with intellectual discussions
(or so we believed) vowing no marriage before thirty,
I stole a whisper from beneath your breath
That sighed you'd probably change.

I hope that you have.
For now he is forever
Your husband, your lover--
At nineteen.

And I was afraid until
With a kiss on my cheek, warm press of the hand
You told me. And then I knew
That you were right, that you were right.

And you're nineteen, going on thirty.

--Cyndie Taylor

Haiku

Sunshine feels like love
warming up my skin and bones
making my soul glow.

--Rachel Harris

--Laura Paschold

ONE DAY

Sunrise

Sleepy eyes
Open to the brightness of the sun
Blinded by its glory

Morning

Funny how
Laughter, life, and love are contagious;
Even the "blue" birds sing

Noon

Shakespeare says
The world's a stage--I beg to differ,
To me it's a picnic

Afternoon

Languidly
The afternoon stretches, like a cat
Tired of being petted

Sunset

Fragile trees
Scratched in opaque black india ink
On a pink parchment sky

Night

Now the globe
Readies for bed--puts on her nightcap
Made of black dotted-swiss

--Paula Dale

MORNING SONGS

From Talisman dawn comes
the sweet morning song
Sparkling,
trilling
it swells into
An aria of light.

Into silken silence
of pre-dawn
The song of a whip-o-will
swells.

From a distant hill
his mate's sweet whisper
Calls,
caresses,
Leads him home.

--Olive Auger

Special Merit Art

--Laura Paschold

DAYBREAK IS COMING SOON

the sea slaps
playfully at the shore
scampering quickly away
only to return and
slap, tickle again
the wind bows
down, looks up
swirling--kissing the dunes
shaping them, reshaping
with each breath
stars upon prance-happy
gamboling stars
frolic and leap then
fall slowly, surely
downward
into
day while
the moonlight paves a path for
lonely seagulls flying home

--Susan Byrum

TIDAL WAVE

The Ocean leapt and lapped the shore
  of Dreamland's clouded sky,
Where winded waters washed a wake
  into the Dreamer's eye,
Which stung with salted spray of sea,
  wept sweeping waves of cry,
Until the Ocean laughed with Death
  and watched the Dreamer die.

--Anne Van Tassel

AFTER FALL

The ocean pulls itself ashore,
By habit
paces back and forth,
remembers spring unshuttered
on this shrouded shore
where now cold sanddrifts
bury hooded shells
that crouch
like graveyard headstones
marking time.

The ocean pulls itself ashore
in ritual returning.
Compulsive winds
break
the frozen stillness of
no hope.

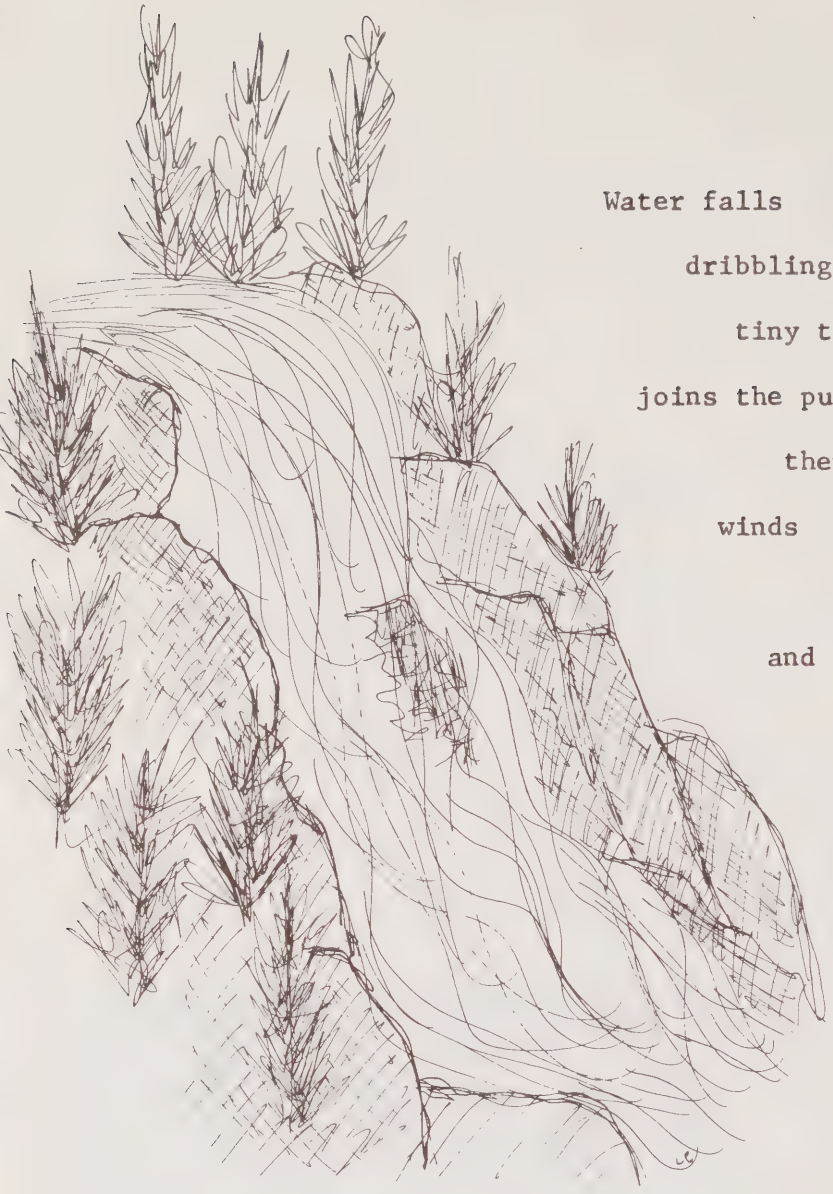
--Carole Tyler

Memory

The sand-crabs that made me squeal
  as a little girl
  In their nocturnal scurryings

Don't seem so menacing,
  now that I have walked with someone
  Stronger than they....

-- Cyndie Taylor



WATERFALLS

Water falls

dribbling from a

tiny tributary--

joins the purls and murmurs of brooks

then

winds

wends

and ribbons its way

down

the

stream

and

Leaps

the goal

Fine and Free

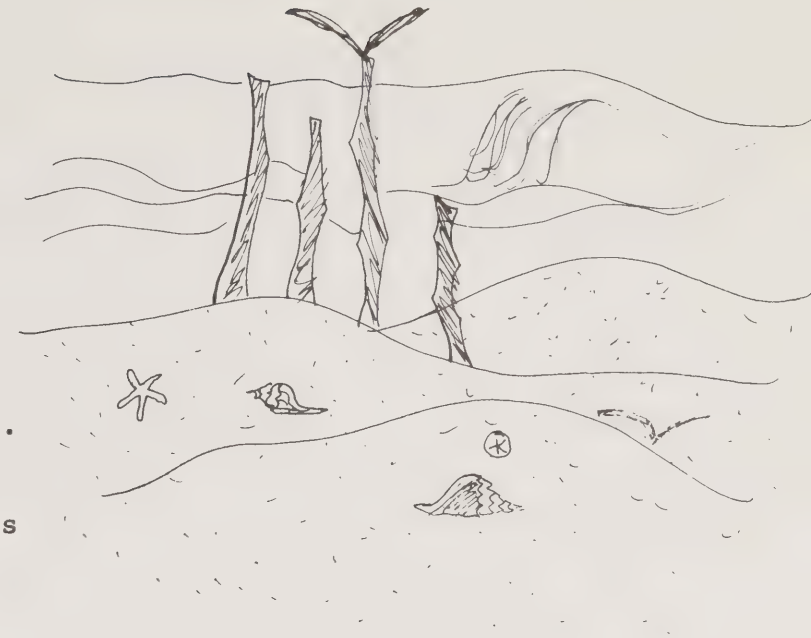
--Julie Boone

SEDUCER

The brown-eyed sailor stands at her side
Watching her smooth, womanly waves
Peak and crest tempting his heart.
With whispered hisses she lures him closer
While sparkling sea shell jewels strewn casually about her
Hypnotises him with their glittering radiance.
He stares into her fathomless green eyes--
Her light, spraying caresses tingle on his skin.
She beckons him once more
With hidden, golden treasures far below.
He walks slowly into her deep green heart
Then with smooth, womanly waves....
She swallows him whole.

--Teri Beacham

LONG WINTERS OF SUMMER DREAMING



Delicious golden rays
Penetrating to the bone
Thank you, God, for beaches,
Especially in summer.

Strings and things
Holding me together
Still freer than the breeze
Swaying sea oats.

Coppertone lotion lavished
Desires and dreams deeper than bronze.

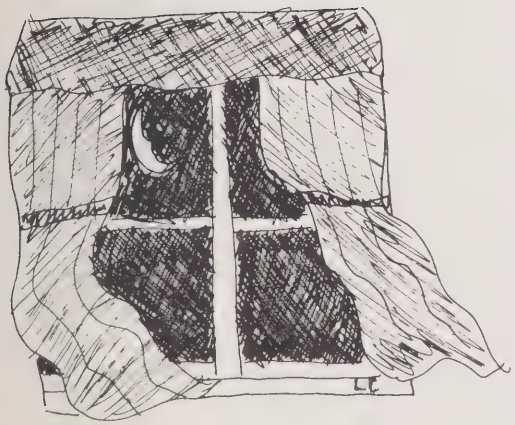
Cool sea foam tingling my toes
Sea gulls confident in baby-blue skies
Fragments of once perfect--
sandollars and shells.

Adorn the long, long beach.

Summertime is my time for
Unwinding complex winters.

--Laura Leppla

NIGHT WIND



Midnight

You breathe against the door
and whistle through the window cracks
like an old man's wheeze
and blow on
With the wondering prayer
of each lonely listener

Will you bring tomorrow?

Will you bring the sunshine?

Will you bring the spring?

You linger,
sigh,
and whisper away

Unanswering.

--Olive Auger

Special Merit Poetry

THE WEATHER FRONT

Billowing greyness
against an inky sky
creeps slowly
tantalizingly
closer.
Each patch of blue
swallowed
chewed
spit out--
grey.
Tanned dunes
whip
and snap
and spit their sand
in defiance
White-capped waves
gnash their teeth
and bite the shore
Pelting rain
slits the steel sky
and slashes the sand
Finally
a shaft of sunlight
drifts through the clouds
Bringing the dawn.

--Olive Auger

Lonely prairie wind
whom do you cry for?
All the little children
never meant to be.

Lonely prairie wind
whom do you sigh for?
All the little children
coming, soon to be.

Lonely prairie wind
whom will you laugh for?
All the little children,
With love,
let them be.

--Olive Auger

SPECIAL MERIT FICTION

COLD SWEAT: A short story by Betsy-John Grimes

Granny always favored Evan, perhaps because he led such a tragic life. Or maybe she felt sorry for him since he was the runt of the family; but I was repulsed at the whole situation.

I stayed with Granny every summer. Mother would drop me off every morning before going to work. I can hear Mother sternly saying, "Be sure to be quiet, cause you might wake Evan." So each morning during the summer, I would sneak in Granny's front door and tiptoe to her bedroom and then crawl under the covers with her for a couple more hours of sleep. But extra hours of sleep seemed like a luxury to her, so out of habit she would get up, soon after I dozed off, to fix a hearty breakfast. I usually woke up to the rattling of spoons or clanging of pans. The smell of sausage and eggs drifted throughout the downstairs until it reached my nose and lured me out of bed. As I followed the scented trail to the kitchen, I noticed that the blinds were always pulled and the door leading upstairs was still closed. I imagined that Evan was up there--waiting. Sometimes, I thought he was waiting for me and was planning a plot to secretly kill me with Granny's carving knife. Then, to dispose of my body, he would have to carry me down to the cellar piece by piece and stuff me into the big mahogany wardrobe. I wanted to know what he was doing up there, but my imagination usually dampened my curiosity. Once, however, I got up enough courage and tried to open the door. I slowly folded my fingers around the old, loose doorknob and began to turn the knob, but Granny saw me, grabbed a yardstick, and chased me into the kitchen yelling, "I'll teach you a lesson about spying on people. You just remember that curiosity always killed the cat." She then hit me on the legs, leaving stinging red welts, and made me stand behind the kitchen door until I thought I could mind my own business.

After breakfast, I always wanted to watch Captain Kangaroo on television or listen to the radio, but that was against the house rules because it would disturb Evan. Instead, I could play along the street in front of the house.

Sometimes a little girl named Melissa would come over from across the street and play with me for hours. We would chase ants out of ant hills and then trap them inside Dixie cups, or dreamingly curtsy and dance with the big white columns on the front porch, or have fancy tea parties. Our favorite game, however, was Storm. We would run outside when it was raining; Melissa was thunder, and I was lightning; and we would race around the front yard 'til we collapsed from exhaustion.

Granny was very protective about my playing habits and made me stay in the front yard, but I never knew why. I knew that Evan's room was in the back of the house, so I figured that had something to do with my not playing in the back yard. But I could not figure out about not going next door. Maybe the neighbors knew too much about Evan, or maybe Granny was afraid that I might say something out-of-line that might add to the neighboring gossip.

Sometimes Granny would come out on the front porch before lunch and read Tarot cards for me.

"Pick a card honey. Don't be afraid."

"But Granny, I don't want to. What if I pick the death card?"

"There's nothing to be afraid of. I'm here to protect you."

She always wore a certain dress for these readings. It was forest green velvet with strange gold silk threads woven in at the neckline in the shape of flowers.

Occasionally she read for friends, but only on the last day of each month. On one occasion, she read for a young man who lived in the neighborhood. The young man's name was Zed, and he was around twenty-five years old. He created window displays at a ladies shop in town and lived with his crippled father. I remember the day of his reading in particular.

"Hello Mrs. Waal," he said as he hurried up the front steps."

"Well, hello Zed. You seem to be in a big hurry today."

"Yes ma'am, I'm late for work."

"Please be seated, and we'll get started right away."

He quickly pulled over a rocker and sat down.

"Pick a card, Zed."

He hesitated for a moment, and then quickly made his selection.

At this point, I noticed Granny's eyes glimmer as she turned over the card. I knew what it was before she even said a word.

"It's the death card, Zed."

He quickly stood up and looked at Granny in disbelief. He seemed stunned for a moment, but then he recovered and left without a word.

The next month Granny set up her cards as usual and waited for Zed to stop by before work. I was playing outside and I could see him coming down the street with an alligator attache in one hand and an old, wrinkled lunch sack in the other. As he approached Granny's yard, he quickened his pace and sprinted past us without saying a word. Several days later, he started to cross over to the other side of the street before he reached our block, and he eventually changed his route altogether.

When Granny was not reading Tarot cards, she would frequently sit on the glider on the front porch and read the obituary column.

"Honey child, what was your third grade teacher's name last year?"

"Ma'am?" I had been daydreaming, so I had only a vague notion of what she had said.

"What was your teacher's name last year?" she asked impatiently. I turned, got up off the ground and cautiously walked up the steps as I traced my finger along the hot black handrail. She had a strange look on her face as she read the paper, so I stood at the top of the steps and waited in anticipation.

"Quickly child!" she said. "Come here and look at this article. Wasn't that your third grade teacher?"

She handed me the newspaper and stared at me as if she was waiting for some sort of reaction. The headline said, "Two Killed in Local Accident." My teacher's name was in the caption below the picture. The article stated that Miss Theresa Lee had been killed instantly.

"I hope it didn't hurt," I said aloud.

I vacantly folded the paper and numbly walked inside. I was not in the mood to talk to Granny, because I knew she would want the two of us to pray for Miss Theresa's soul. Granny's soul-saving prayers always scared me, so I decided to get my jumprope instead.

As I opened the front door, I heard someone in the kitchen. At first, I could not figure out who it was, and then I realized that if Granny was on the porch, it had to be Evan. I quietly went to the hall closet, eased the door open, got my jumprope, and cautiously headed back outside. On my way out, I noticed the door leading upstairs ajar. Granny came in about this time, looked at the door, then at me, and then ordered me out of the house. "Didn't I tell you to play outside, child. You know you mustn't disturb Evan." I was about to explode with curiosity because I wanted to to know what was going on in the kitchen and see Evan and Granny together at last. But I obediently returned to the front yard and jumped rope for awhile.

About fifteen minutes later, I abruptly stopped jumping rope because I heard the faint sound of laughter coming from within the house. I was puzzled for a moment, and then without thinking, I mechanically walked up the front steps as if I was being lured inside. When I reached the storm door, I laid my jumprope down on the porch and slipped off my flip-flops. I opened the door only wide enough to accommodate my size, cautiously edged my way inside and then carefully eased the door closed, thus preventing the latch from clicking. I stood paralyzed in the foyer, unsure of what to do, and then regained my faculties long enough to creep into the living room and fortify myself behind the couch.

By this time, my head was pounding, and my hands had broken out into a cold sweat. Suddenly, I heard footsteps coming from the kitchen into the living room. The footsteps stopped about six feet away, and there was complete silence except for the pulse that was pounding away at my temples. After a few agonizing seconds, I heard the telephone click and a number being dialed. Although I thought my heart was permanently lodged in my throat and that I might start gagging at any moment, I slowly peered around the side of the couch. Evan was at the phone.

I immediately noticed how heavy he had gotten and how his arms were wrinkled and hung like bags of oatmeal. His hair was like a mass of cobwebs, and his skin was yellower than Granny's dentures. I must admit he did look rather sad, slumped over the phone with his old, torn housecoat pulled tight across his back and shoulders. One time, earlier that summer, when I was secretly playing in Granny's bedroom, I had found a picture of Evan in her jewelry box. As a young man, he had been extremely handsome with dark brown hair and black eyes. On the back of the picture, he had written, "To Selma, With All My Love--Evan." As I peeped at him from behind the couch, it was hard to believe that this was the same man.

Once again silence prevailed as I curled up even tighter behind the couch. Then abruptly he asked the party he was calling, "Would you please refill a prescription of Valium for my wife at 121 Jones Drive. Her name is Selma Waal." I could not understand what he was saying; we were at 121 Jones Drive; his wife was dead; and Selma Waal was my grandmother.

Evan curtly terminated the call and hung up the receiver of the phone. I then saw that in one hand he had a bottle of medicine. Soothingly, he said, "Come here Mother, I have something for your nerves that will help you relax. It always works for me." He smiled, gave her a pill, and then took a pill for himself. They stared at each other as if they shared a secret unknown to anyone else. He then put his arm around her shoulders, and they retreated to the kitchen whispering.

I squatted quietly behind the couch, contemplating my next move. Then I cautiously crawled out across the carpeted floor until I reached the door leading upstairs. Even though my left leg had grown numb, I lifted myself up into a kneeling position and slowly stood up. I quickly slipped inside the enclosed stairwell and quietly closed the door behind me.

As I turned to climb the stairs, I became aware of a musty atmosphere. It was almost completely dark so I took one step at a time so as to avoid tripping or making any unnecessary noise. When I reached the top of the stairs, I looked down the dimly lit hallway, not knowing which door led to Evan's room. I tried to open the first door on the right, but it was locked. So I crossed the hallway and noticed that the first door on the left was slightly open. Slowly I nudged the door forward and peeped inside. My head was pounding again, and the cold sweat on my hands had spread all over my body.

When I entered the room, I felt as if I had penetrated the barrier between the known and the unknown. There were newspapers strewn all over the floor; the blinds were pulled; it was fairly dim, and there were little orange dots glowing in the room--ashtrays containing lit cigarettes were scattered around the room. As I moved to the middle of the room, I became engulfed in a thick, muggy atmosphere that had a foul smell. The bed was unmade, and syringes covering the dresser and nightstand with two boxes of prescription pads on the floor next to the dresser.

For a moment, I was in a state of mental and emotional shock. Suddenly, however, I was startled back into reality when I heard whispering from downstairs. There was a vent in the floor, so I silently crouched down next to it and listened to what was being said.

"Sonny Boy, Mother will protect you. I won't let the family put my baby boy away. If they try to commit you, we'll fight it in court! Don't worry, son, heaven nor hell could not separate us now!" It was my grandmother's voice seeping through the vent.

"I know that I can trust you, Mother, but I'm still afraid of what the family might try to do. They might even come here, invade the premises, and take our supply. If only we could be alone forever, just the two of us."

"Don't worry child, we have now and eternity. I'll make sure everything and everyone is taken care of!" Granny said assuredly.

I quickly and quietly darted out of the room, down the stairs and ran outside. I breathlessly slipped on my flip-flops, grabbed my jumprope, ran down the front steps, and played as hard as I could.

It must have been about an hour later that Granny came out on the front porch to rock. Her gray hair was down around her shoulders, and her dress was unbuttoned at the neck. She looked contented and happy, and flashed a very affectionate smile. She watched me play for a while and then asked me to come sit in her lap. I reluctantly complied to her wishes and shyly walked up the steps dragging my jumprope behind me. I anxiously stood at the top of the steps with horrible thoughts spinning around in my head. She pulled a piece of peppermint candy out of her apron pocket as an offering to entice me onto her lap. She then took my hands, wiped the cold seat off with her apron, and pulled me towards her. I can still hear her saying, "You're Granny's baby child, yes, you are!"

TO HIM

Come search for me, come find my soul--
In all the hid
den places look.
Don't be dismayed by stumbling time
Or by great dif
ficulties shook.

Do not look in a bookstore, there
To find me in
A book--perchance
In Conrad, Alcott, Tolstoy, Blair,
By leather and
Dank smells enhanced.

I'm not behind a tall strong drink
Where men their cheap
Low passions bare.
Don't search the honky-tonks and bars,
Remember this--
Forget the Square.

And don't you dare scan small cafes
Amongst red wine
And kosher dills,
I'm not around the vichyssoisse;
My tastes don't run
To gourmet meals.

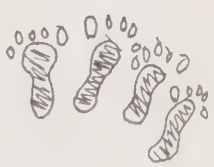
You won't find me behind a desk,
Poised pen in hand
And sorting files--
It's not my dream to organize
A fat man's life
In small neat piles.

If you should go to Africa,
To Paris and
To Londontown,
To find me there and bring me home,
Forget it, kid,
I'm not around.

"So where am I to find your soul?"

Search for a spot
With creaky swings,
You'll find me playing hide-and-seek
'Mid monkey bars
And childhood things.

And if, considering my life,
You'd like to come
And stay with me,
Forget your silly, pompous airs--



Kick off your shoes

And play with me!

--Paula Dale

as a child
i laughed a lot
sang and cried
now i played grown-up
smile a lot stretched myself to grow
sing and cry fell from high-heel shoes
act like a kid . . .finally grew up.
walk on my knees
try to learn from mistakes
. . .search for a lost childhood.

--Sandra Anderson

GAMES

leaning against my window pane,

i watched the children playing games.

games of chance and games of woe:

a set of rules i'll never know.

brewing mud and venom vile

torturing sparrows for a while.

i closed my curtains, went downstairs

still hearing chants that filled the air.

--Betsy Grimes

AS FAR AS I CAN SEE

From the window
the rolling hills and grassy meadows
curl around my daydreams
like kittens to the warmth of
their own bodies...
giving me faith that He exists and
fright that I'm here alone
and I
could
fall
out of
this
window
and
see
death.

--Marianne Harbison

SCENE: NEW YORK CITY

Little Indian swindlers
With New York accents, clutching
White roses,
Darting like sooty sparrows
To peck at passers-by--
"Mistah, will ya buy a rose for your lady?"
Future shock combination of
Fast city talkers and mistreated Cherokee.
Scurry, scurry with their horde as it disappears
--Into a fund for the Cherokee?
More likely, the hands of a junkie.
Two 46th Street theatre-goers
Spotted too late.
The couple merely smiles
--empty beneficence--
And stroll on, stroll on
Failing to see the piercing darkness
Of the eyes
And hopes
Against the clutched, wilting
White roses.

--Cyndie Taylor

REBIRTH

Manson eyes
crucified her senses
embedding splinters in her soul
that transformed her interior
from innocent hyde into
who gives-a-damn jekel.
Wheeling around, she spun to a stop
directed by a JFK smile
sending her down the American road
paved with precious pursuit
of snow doves
which soon dove deep
into delving melodies of Kristofferson's seductive solos
smothered in Tequila tunes and cocaine chords.
The healing hands of headless John
lifted her from the drunken pool
only to intoxicate her once more
with the water
of Life.

--Candy Clapp

Old man,
while you slump on your two-step porch,
whittling between your knees--
only the wind dares to move her
rocking chair.
Hers was a home--
yours, but a weather-worn shanty.
The paint-chipped wheelbarrow planter
hosts more weeds than geraniums now.
You watch the big old oak tree--
See how it changes hues no more?
Life for you is like those hordes of dogs and cars-
wandering endlessly in time.
The rust-encrusted water pump that
sprouts from the ground?
Oh, yes it is as dried up as you are now.

--Teri Beacham

AGL

Cratchety, rickety
rusty-hinged door
No hand is turning
its knob anymore.
Hanging there battered and
beaten with years
Spattered with raindrops
it cries rusty tears.
Sound no longer echoes
through its timeworn face
Of past lives, past people
there's left not a trace.
Covered with cobwebs and
powdered with dust
Swaying and creaking
its splintery crust,

Cracked, frail, rust-eaten
old weathered-hinged door
No hand is turning
its knob anymore.

--Susan Byrum

IT WAS SO EASY THEN

How slow the days
how quiet the times
The time of year
when you know it should be
new loafers with brand new pennies..
or saddle-oxfords and kneesocks
with the cheers all sounding the same
v-i-c-t-o-r-y
and the best thing to have was a blue
canvas notebook to write
I LOVE ?? all over..
and the Christmas tinsel hung over
"Chatty Cathy", The Game of Life, and tons of
candy and fruit..
and the Valentine candy that reads
"I want you"..
and the spring of the year with the smell
of flowers and the feel of freshly cut grass
beneath your feet..
and the summer at the beach or spent
simply laying around eating popsicles..
and then it is back to the autumn
How slow the days
how quiet the times.

--Debbie Hobbs

"Lullaby"

Mamma hold me in your lap
Wrap your knowing arms around me
Keep me, please, from growing up
Much faster than i'm able.

Mama rock me, rock me back
To jumpropes, hopscotch, paper dolls
Back to playgrounds filled with smiles
Where childhood games can't harm me.

i'm afraid both night and day
Sometimes i feel so cold inside
Guard me, Mama, from myself
Hold me so i won't hurt me.

See me hurl the hurtful blow
First at my friends and then at me
Stop me, Mama, while you can
Keep the blow from striking.

Mama hide me in your love
Let your apron be my shelter
Cradle me, help me to sleep
Be tender, please don't wake me.

--Susan Byrum

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